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ABSTRACT

If schools are to be professionally responsive to and accountable to their clients, each school must have some control over decisions affecting its particular student body. These include decisions in the areas of policy, curriculum, staffing, facilities, resources (and related finances), evaluation processes, and participation in system-level planning. Involvement of students, parents, teachers, and the school administrative staff in these decisions can have several advantages, including broader-based and better informed decisions, a reduction in alienation of the local school community, improved communications and relations between school and community, the development of better methods for conflict resolution, and the creation of a school program more reflective of the sociocultural makeup of the community. This document presents the concept of decision sharing as handled in New South Wales as a topic for further discussion, concentrating specifically on the roles of parents, teachers, students, and administrative personnel in the process. (Author/PGD)

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THE CASE FOR

SCHOOL BASED DECISION SHARING

A DISCUSSION PAPER

Prepared by: GREG ANDREWS
for the
NSW SCHOOL BASED DECISION SHARING PROJECT

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FOREWORD

Education authorities from throughout Australia in conjunction with the Schools Commission held a National Conference on School Based Decision-Making in Sydney during June, 1977. After the conference, the NSW delegation formed an ad hoc working group to formulate proposals for follow-up activities in this State. Early in 1978, the NSW School Based Decision Sharing Project was initiated with a Special Projects Grant from the Schools Commission as one of the activities of this state Group.

The project is a co-operative activity involving the NSW Department of Education, the Catholic Education Commission, the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW, the Interim Committee for the National Association of Catholic Parents Organizations, the NSW Federation of Infants' Schools Clubs, the NSW Teachers' Federation and the Association of Independent Schools. The project aims to assist school authorities, parent and teacher organizations, and individual parents, teachers and community members in understanding the rationale underlying school based decision sharing; current practices in NSW and other Australian States; the problems involved; and the conditions and strategies that are required to facilitate progress towards further devolution in education.

This discussion paper represents Stage 1 of the project and is aimed at stimulating consideration of the issues surrounding the concept of school based decision sharing and eliciting reactions from interested parties. These reactions will form a vital part of the research for the second stage of the project which will look at the problems involved in the development of alternative models for implementing shared decision-making in schools. The final stage of the project involves the setting up of experimental pilot projects to evaluate these schemes.

This paper was commissioned by the Steering Committee of the NSW School Based Decision Sharing Project whose members are listed below:-

JOAN BROWN	NSW Federation of Infants' Schools Clubs
RAY CAVENAGH	NSW Teachers' Federation
TOTTI COHEN	Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of NSW

PETER CRIMMINS	Catholic Education Commission
LES GORDON	NSW Department of Education
BERNARD HENRY	NSW Department of Education
BILL HUME	Schools Commission
MONICA TURNER	Interim Committee for the National Association of Catholic Parents' Organizations
IAN VACCHINI	NSW Department of Education
ATHOL VERDON	NSW Department of Education

While not necessarily representing their views, the paper is commended by the Committee not as a blueprint for change, but as a stimulus to thinking and discussion. Responses to the paper, not only to the ideas but also to the practical implications, would be most welcomed.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years throughout Australia there has been a growing tendency for the focus of educational decision-making to move away from central authorities to more localised levels. In NSW this tendency has been marked by the growth of regionalization and the devolution to the school of responsibility for a whole range of educational decisions, particularly in the area of curriculum. The fact that this shift is a world-wide phenomenon suggests that it is not simply a minor adjustment in the pattern of authority and responsibility, nor just a current fad or fashion. On the contrary, it indicates a decisive shift in our ideas about education and the functions of the institutions through which we realize our educational policies and aspirations.

The principles on which this move towards devolution are based, are firstly that decisions should be made as close to the learning situation as possible, and secondly, that the decisions should be shared by those that they directly affect. The school thus becomes the main arena of educational decision-making that involves the participation of the key members of the school community - teachers, students and parents.

WHY SCHOOL BASED DECISIONS?

The move away from a centralist model of educational decision-making relates to a growing awareness of its unsuitability for delivery of a truly professional service. Two key elements of any professional service are responsiveness to the client and accountability to the client. If schools are to deliver a truly professional service, they need a direct point of contact with their client community at which they can respond immediately to their client's needs and wishes and be responsible to them for the actions they take.

More often than not, external systems of influence that guide a school's policy and functioning are ill-fitted to respond to individual differences in students. More and more, aspects of curricula, textbooks, examinations and even teaching methods that are externally imposed or inherited by default through tradition and an inhibition about innovation tend to be irrelevant to the needs and social situations of children in particular schools. Yet these differences that reflect the growing diversity of the social and cultural experience of school children today, as well as

those of socio-economic status, motivation, ability, learning style and interests, are of crucial importance to learning.

If schools are to deliver a truly professional service by catering for the needs and interests of individual children, then they must have the power to make those decisions which are of critical significance to the education of individual students.

Curriculum development, in particular, needs to be a continuous process related to the experiences of the learner and the life of the school. Only the school can provide the proper context for this. Members of the school community are not only in the best position to identify students' needs and interests and to mould the curriculum and school organisation to suit these, but they are also in the best position to determine the optimum use that can be made of the school's particular resources and teacher expertise. If the people who actually participate in the implementation of the curriculum are those that have the principal part in devising it, the gap between theory and practice is narrowed and they will also be more committed to its implementation.

To encourage the development of learning situations that are best suited to the particular students and teachers within a single school the school must have the right and means to determine all aspects of its educational program within the broad guidelines and budget laid down by the State level authorities.

A number of important educational decisions are therefore considered to be best made at the school level. These include decisions relating to :-

- the formation of school policy, aims, objectives and rules
- the planning, implementation and evaluation of curriculum appropriate to the students at the school
- the deployment and development of appropriate professional and ancillary staff to mount the curriculum adequately
- the control of resources and buildings to achieve the same purposes. This necessitates the discretionary control of school funds

- the evaluation of school programs and pupil progress; and

- participation in system level planning as it relates to that particular school.

Some of these decisions are more easily moved to the school level than others, however, all these decisions are already being made by many Australian schools.

School based decision-making can also be justified on other grounds. One is that it should lead to improved efficiency in the deployment and use of resources to promote effective learning. Those on the spot are the ones most suitably placed to assess the kinds of resources needed for a school's optimal operation and to organize the available resources, including the resources to be found in the community, to provide an effective and efficient educational experience for all students.

The move towards school based decision-making is also directly connected with major social changes of the last ten years that reflect increasing demands to decentralize authority and to develop a participative democracy. It has been suggested that the wide variety of opinions and demands now found even within one local community calls for new methods of decision-making in public institutions.

School based decision-making does not imply system disorder or anarchy. It in no way negates the need for central State authorities to take a leadership role in developing the general aims of education and budgetary and resource use guidelines as well as guarding against the disadvantage of specific minority groups and localities. Nor does it reduce the need for regional and central support agencies. It does imply, however, that the structure of the educational system should reflect the central role of the school as the creative focus of the educational enterprise.

Discussion Points:

- *Who are the clients of the school?*
- *What responsibilities can or should be devolved to the school level?*
- *What structures need to be developed at the school level to allow these decisions to be made?*
- *What changes are possible now?*

WHY SHARED DECISION-MAKING?

The rationale for shared decision-making at the school level is based on two principles - one derived from political theory, the other firmly grounded in practicalities. The first is the belief, central to any democratic society, that the people affected by decisions made in any institution should have a voice in making those decisions. The second is that people will be more committed to the decisions and changes that affect them if they have been involved in bringing them about.

A healthy democratic society is built both on representation and participation in decision-making. For too long, however, community participation in important educational decision-making has been limited to indirect representative means at the central government level. The voice of the public in educational decision-making is mostly restricted to the election of governments which appoint a minister responsible for education who implements a policy through a highly bureaucratised and hierarchical administration system. In a large, complex society like ours, this form of representation is not only indirect, but highly inefficient. The long delays between elections means the ballot box is a very blunt instrument of accountability. Furthermore, people are only able to endorse very general policies rather than voice specific opinions on the more important decisions and practices that affect them in reality at the local level.

Another form of representation is found in consultative procedures that include parents and teachers on committees responsible for making major curriculum and other planning decisions. The test of any consultative procedure, however, is whether it transfers any real power from the administration to the clients. Too often the representation on these committees is tokenistic and the decisions arrived at rarely differ from those that would have otherwise been taken.

The problem of representation is exacerbated by the fact that the people sitting on the committees are usually appointed to present the views of organisations which often have only a distant and indirect relationship to their individual members. Additionally, because the body of people eligible to be represented by these organisations is larger than their membership, their power of representation is reduced. The fact that so few people are aware of these consultative procedures suggests that they are largely an ineffectual means of promoting participatory decision-making.

In the case of either ministerial or consultative representation, the ordinary people involved with particular schools are far removed from influencing the major decisons that ultimately have bearing on the educational process. The need for a more direct form of participation is therefore great.

In a truly participative democracy, decision-making becomes a process whereby people propose, discuss, plan, decide and implement those decisions that affect their own lives. Only in this way are the real interests of the people protected. At the school level, this necessitates the sharing of major decisions by the principal partners in the educational process at that level - the teachers, students and parents - not by external representatives. Participation in this form is further justified on the grounds that decisions should always be made with the fullest knowledge of their consequences as is possible. This is best assured by involving in the decision-making process all those influenced by the consequences.

The second principle on which shared decision-making at the school level is based is the belief that it promotes commitment and responsibility. Extensive research in industry has provided clear-cut evidence of this. On the one hand, studies have shown that the centralization of decision-making and the fragmentation of labour decreases the employee's control over his or her work and increases

feelings of alienation. To counteract this, people invariably try to increase their power in the work place often by disruptive means such as working to rules, go slows, taking 'sickies', etc. On the other hand, studies of situations where worker participation in management is encouraged consistently show definite increases in morale and productivity.

Case study material suggests that similar reactions occur in schools.[1] Where schools belong to highly centralized systems or have autocratic principals, teachers tend to experience a similar undermining of their control over their work environment and the social relations within that environment.

Teachers seldom see themselves as having the power or authority to change the school organisation, the timetable or make major changes to the curriculum. A recent survey by the Curriculum Action Project at Macquarie University of teachers and executive staff, found that in NSW authority in the making of curriculum decisions was seen to lay firstly in the hands of the Education Department, Heads of Department and External Examination Bodies.[2] If teachers perceive themselves as having little power in relation to the administration, their commitment to the task will be severely limited. The teaching-learning process can only suffer from such withdrawal of involvement and responsibility. In schools where teachers are involved in collegial decision-making, the benefits are manifested in high staff morale, low mobility and greater innovation in teaching practices.

In a manner similar to the industrial worker, students frequently react to their powerlessness in affecting the goals or running of the school by breaking rules, developing elaborate games to avoid work and restricting their intellectual 'production'. Where students have been involved in educational planning, however, the results are often the opposite. Studies of the informal or open classroom and of community schools frequently show that greater efficiency in reaching educational goals is achieved when students are given formal decision-making power to choose relevant subjects and pathways to

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1. Westley, W. *Sociology of Participatory Planning. In* Participatory Planning in Education, *Paris : O.E.C.D., 1974.*

2. *Cohen, D, Harrison, M.* Perceptions of Decision-Making in School Based Curriculum Development. *Project Report No 1, Curriculum Action Project, Macquarie University, October, 1977.*

learning. Paulo Freire's work with Brazilian peasants[1] and Sylvia Ashton-Warner's experience in teaching Maori children to read[2] provide graphic illustrations of how relevance and real participation in educational decision-making functions to increase learning.

As people are more likely to feel a deeper commitment and responsibility to decisions that they know they have influenced, participation in decision-making at the school level will not only reduce the feelings of alienation experienced by teachers and students, but will also promote their acceptance of decisions made.

This realization has always been central to the Schools Commission's philosophy of devolving responsibility in education as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling. The Commission has expressed it in this way:-

> " ..... belief in the grassroots approach to the control of schools reflects a conviction that responsibility will be most effectively discharged where the people entrusted with making decisions are also the people responsible for carrying them out, with an obligation to justify them and in a position to profit from their experience."[3]

Making people more responsible and committed to the decisions they make is a valuable end in itself : it gives people more control over their own lives and functions as an important learning and self-development process. Participation is an intrinsically challenging educational activity which transforms the education process into being both more effective and more humane. Two of the key elements that it depends upon, personal responsibility and social responsibility are valuable pedagogical goals in themselves. When these goals become genuinely operational at the school level in what teachers, pupils and parents do together, the school is really fulfilling one of its most important and respected socialization tasks.

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1. Freire, P. Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Hamondsworth: Penguin, 1972.

2. Ashton-Warner, S. Teacher, London: Secker & Warburg, 1963.

3. Schools in Australia. Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission. Canberra: AGPS, 1973, p 10.

By quickening institutional responsiveness, the sharing of important educational decisions at the school level has the additional effects of increasing accountability in two ways. In the first instance, the involvement of parents and community members in decision-making means that their consent is directly obtained for the educational efforts undertaken by the school. Secondly, increasing local participation makes the schools more responsive via shared decision-making powers between school authorities and the people whose lives are touched by the schools. In a broad sense it is accountability through political exercise. As administrative structures are further decentralized and become more open, the local school personnel become more responsible to local groups.

Discussion Points:

- *Does participation lead to commitment or is commitment a prerequisite for participation?*
- *Who should participate in each type of decision at the school level and in what ways?*
- *Can schools be responsible and accountable to their own "school community"?*

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

The development of school based decision sharing is dependent on the recognition of the legitimate role that each of the partners in the educational process has in determining the purposes of the school and putting these into operation. The role of each significant group is briefly discussed below.

Teachers: In the conventional school administrative structure those most closely concerned with the educational undertaking, the teachers, have little opportunity to exercise due influence on educational policy even though they are closest to the students and, therefore, in the best position to make accurate assessments of their needs. Their limited power to influence educational policy, in the State system especially, is a fundamental cause of the prevailing sense of frustration and dissatisfaction found amongst practising teachers. As one of the most highly qualified work forces in

the country, it is clearly apparent that the breadth of teacher skills and competence goes mostly unrecognised and underused.

Teachers are responsible for providing educational experiences for students and, therefore, should have the right to be involved in all decisions that facilitate those experiences. This demands a shifting of power from the executive who currently make most operational decisions to the teaching staff and a redefinition of the roles of both. The devolution of decision-making within a school is essential to provide teachers with the opportunity to fully realise their professional aspirations.

An essential part of this professional responsibility is the need to reach out, involve and be responsive to the needs and values of the clients they serve - students and parents. Collaboration in decision-making with these groups is therefore entirely consistent with the increased professionalism of teachers.

In keeping with the development of professional ability and in order to become more responsible and more accountable for their actions, teachers need to be given more room to participate in the formulation and implementation of the educational policy and program of the school. Such participation will not only foster competence, but is also likely to foster a climate for innovation. The role of leadership and management in schools has been found to be the most important variable in explaining the fate of innovations.[1] Given the usual hierarchical model of decision-making and management operating in most schools, it is not surprising to find that little fundamental change is evident. Even though innovation is a current catchword in education, an atmosphere of defensive conservatism is generally the reality in the majority of schools. Until the executive monopoly on the direction of change at the school is broken, and decisions on policy and organization are shared with the school community, innovation and change will be minimal and the teaching-learning situation will never by fully actualised.

In a creative, responsive school, teachers would have a legitimate right to participate (with others) in making the following decisions:-

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1. Gross, N et al. Implementing Organisational Innovation, London: Harper & Rowe, 1971.

the development of educational aims

the planning of an appropriate curriculum

- the selection of curriculum content and classroom instructional methods and materials
- the design of the school organization which is to serve curriculum demands
- the evaluation of the curriculum and the school organisation
- the evaluation of school personnel including teaching peers and executive staff
- the selection of executive staff.

Teachers in NSW participate in some of these decisions already. However, the latter decisions would require a radical restructuring of the current system. Nevertheless, teachers in other States and systems currently participate in programs of peer promotion assessment and executive staff selection and effective models are available.

Discussion Points:

- *What areas of decision-making do teachers need to participate in if they are to fully develop their professional role?*
- *How can teachers involve and communicate better with parents?*
- *Who should select the teaching staff at the school?*

Parents: The case for participation by parents in the school's decision-making process is based on two fundamental arguments - one educational, the other political.

Firstly, research reports have repeatedly shown that parents have as powerful an influence on school outcomes, or pupil achievement and success as any other educational factor, including all the inputs of the school. A student's success at school has been found to be largely dependent on home background, on whether the parents are satisfied with the school and whether they reinforce its aims and actively assist to achieve them. Effectiveness in education depends heavily, therefore, on a congruence of aims and attitudes between home and school. When this is absent, the school is usually rejected by the student.

There is only one correct educational response to these findings: school authorities must acknowledge the importance of parental influence and enter into a genuine partnership with parents to present the child with a unified, or at least non-contradictory, orientation towards learning. Such a partnership requires a program of effective communication and reporting to parents, passing through various stages of parent involvement in school activities and leading to the active involvement of parents in the management and governance of the life of the school. Only in this way can education achieve its maximum potential and parents fulfill their duty of ensuring that the school functions to meet the needs of their children.

The second main argument for including parents in school based decision-making is that parents and community members are the true clients of the school. Parents pay for the school and its resources either directly or indirectly and should therefore be entitled to participate effectively in its operation. Surveys have shown that teachers are highly reluctant even to talk to parents, and the current organisation of public education in NSW for instance, only helps to encourage this by obscuring totally the accountability schools owe them. By being so indirect, the formal channels of redress through the elected Ministerial representative are not only highly inefficient but tend to encourage teachers to isolate themselves from the legitimate demands of their clients. This generates feelings of remoteness and powerlessness in the public and creates the impression that teachers and principals are more answerable to "the Department" than they are to the parents of the children for whom they are responsible.

If teachers and executive staff are professional educators, they must be, and must be seen to be, directly accountable to their clients. Professional staff should be assessed in terms of their ability to deliver the service that their clients request and need. This is not to suggest that teachers should be placed at the mercy of parents. On the contrary, an essential part of a teacher's duty is to brief parents adequately so that they are able to articulate their needs and demands in an informed manner.

The charge that most parents are not really interested in participating in school management is hard to deny. However, when it is considered that schools for so long have been "fortresses", actively discouraging parental involvement or trivialising it where it is allowed, the cause of the problem becomes apparent. Apathy is closely related to lack of power. Where parents are given more real power to influence important decisions they will be more interested in participating. Overseas experience indicates that local influence becomes significant only when participatory structures are linked with effective control over resources and political power.[1]

As to the qualifications of parents to engage in educational decision-making, the question should not involve what parents know about the technicalities of education, but what they can come to know. It is no longer the case that teachers have the exclusive competence to formulate educational policy. There is a considerable difference between knowing how to teach effectively and having the sole right to say what the ends of this teaching should be.

Parents have a legitimate right and an important contribution to make to the framing of the curriculum and the aims and objectives of the school. Furthermore, they have a legitimate right to assist in making many of the other decisions that contribute to the implementation and evaluation of these aims and objectives. This means giving parents a mandate to participate fully in the essential ingredients of school based decision-making :-

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1. *Smith, M.P. Alienation and Bureaucracy - The Role of Participatory Administration. Public Administration Review, 1971, 31, 6; Lieberman, M. Power and Policy in Education, in F.M. Elockington and R.S. Patterson (Eds.) Schools, Society and the Professional Educator, N.Y.: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston, 1968.*

- school policy
- curriculum
- rules and procedures
- student welfare
- resource management
- staffing policy

The success of parental involvement in these decisions will be largely dependent on the extent to which teachers participate successfully in the same areas. Staff confident of their own role in decision-making will not only feel less threatened by parental participation, but they will recognise its necessity and actively work to promote it.

Discussion Points

- *What decisions at the school level should parents be involved in?*
- *What decisions should community members be involved in?*
- *How can the home and school be brought closer together?*

Students: The active involvement of students in school based decision-making is important firstly to assess their needs and interests to provide them with the most appropriate education, and secondly to socialise students as citizens in a democratic society.

Students are the immediate clients of a school and are of critical importance in formulating its educational policy and curriculum. Only by involving them in the process can the school be truly responsive to their needs. Students often have different educational philosophies and goals from their teachers and parents. Unless they are in a position to negotiate and resolve those

differences, conflict in the learning situation will result. A consistent finding from research shows that student achievement is lower and student alienation is higher in schools perceived as having a high degree of bureaucracy and emphasising hierarchical structures.[1]

Teachers and students are both involved in the same educational problems and only through co-operation can they be solved. The assessment of pupil readiness and the relevance of curriculum materials to individual needs and interests can only be determined through effective feedback mechanisms and collaboration between teachers and students.

Students have a legitimate right to express their points of view on the educational decisions that affect them most directly. Policy making that does not hear and respect those views will be ineffectual. As well as helping overcome the alienation felt by students, responsible participation in school based decision-making will enable students to develop a clearer understanding of the educational issues schools must deal with and promote a more mature and informed point of view about the processes involved.

Student morale is heightened by the creation of opportunities for their participation in the decisions that affect them. These opportunities should not be restricted to those areas traditionally considered to be of direct interest to students such as dress and behaviour, and social, sporting and recreational activities. They must be expanded to include participation in decisions concerning school organisation and policy.

Student participation should not be limited to the powerless forms so commonly found where student councils, or house or prefect bodies make demands in unresponsive environments or simply "rubber-stamp executive decisions concerning their welfare. Student forums should be given legitimate power and the right of representation on school committees and at staff meetings.

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1. *Ratsoy, E.W. Participation and hierarchical management of schools. Some emerging generalisations.* The Journal of Educational Administration, *1973, XI, 2.*

The other major rationale for involving students in school based decision-making is that it is the most effective way of socialising them for responsible citizenship in a democratic society. True democracy depends not only on having a democratic constitution, but on providing real opportunities for people to learn its meaning and use. If a main task of the school is to educate children to be responsible members of society, it is imperative that its internal functioning should reflect those very democratic principles that our society is founded upon.

Not only should participation in decision-making give individuals more political confidence and encourage them to be politically active in later life, but the development of participatory practices will equip students with important social-psychological skills to respond effectively to the forces of change in our society.

Discussion Points:

- *What decisions do students have a legitimate right to participate in?*
- *What measures can be taken to give students more responsibility?*

Principal and Executive Staff: In a professional or semi-professional organization like a school, the only real function of those not directly performing the service of teaching is to support those who do perform that service.[1] Unfortunately, this is the opposite of what is normally observed in schools today. The entire administrative hierarchy and the policies which guide it seem to be designed to control those who perform the service.

In a responsive environment where decision-making is shared, the principal and executive staff would not sit at the apex of a pyramid of authority, but at the centre of a network of human relationships where they would function as change catalysts and resource people. Rather than reducing the influence and importance

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1. *For a full discussion of this point see Amitai Etzioni, "Authority Structure and Organizational Effectiveness", Administrative Science Quarterly, 1959, 4, 43-67.*

of the school executive, school based decision-making would heighten their leadership role though its form would be changed. A system of participatory decision-making at the school level requires a great deal of administrative and organizational innovation and would thus draw heavily on the skills and leadership qualities of those responsible for its orchestration. By virtue of their qualifications, experience and character the principal and executive staff are in a position to exercise a significant entrepreneurial function within the school to make school based decision sharing a reality.

Under a system of participatory management and planning, the new role of the principal and executive would include the following:-

- establishing an effective communications network between the participants in dec sion-making in the school community
- providing for the necessary training and acquisition of information to increase the competence of the participants in decision-making
- guiding and facilitating the participative process within the school
- helping the participating groups engage in ongoing action research to guide their decision-making
- securing expert advice and support services from other segments of the education system
- liaising with external agencies on behalf of the school
- ensuring that the decisions made in the school are effectively implemented and evaluated.

As the skills needed for this role encompass not only those on an administrative task dimension, but more importantly, those on a social dimension, the compatibility of executive staff with the teaching staff and other members of the school community is absolutely essential. The achievement of such compatibility may necessitate some form of participation of the school community in the selection or election of executive staff.

Discussion Points:

- *Are there any decisions that should only be made by principals and executive staff?*
- *How can the executive effectively share their responsibilities?*

Region and Centre: A major goal of an education system characterized by school based decision sharing would be the attainment of diversity in the nature of the education provided by different schools, with equality in the standard of that education. This places a great deal of responsibility on the higher levels of administration for the development and protection of this initiative. When the school becomes the focal point of governance, the role of the region and the centre changes from one of control to one of leadership and support in which they act as co-ordinating bodies responsive to local needs and responsible for monitoring the new collegiate structure of which they themselves are a part.

This responsibility could be exercised through four main operations:-

(a) a planning program to assist schools in developing participatory management: at the central level this would involve the generation of changes, including legislative and budgetary changes, for fostering, organising and evaluating the participatory process throughout the entire system. A central concern of this planning program would be the securing of equal representation and development for the comparatively powerless elements of the educational community such as minority groups. At the regional level the development of the participatory process would be assisted through the provision of consultative and inservice support for schools undergoing organizational change.

(b) an information service: the centre's professional and analytic activities would be geared to the dissemination of information in forms which would promote widespread understanding and informed planning and decision-making throughout the system. This service would include the generation of information through experimental research, the analysis of educational issues and organizational problems, and the development of broad curriculum objectives and evaluation procedures. At the regional level, the service would provide information on such things as resources and resource personnel available in the locality, projected enrolment figures and regional social patterns.

(c) a network of communications: both regional and central administrations would be charged with the responsibility of establishing and maintaining effective channels of information.

(d) structures for supporting curriculum and staff development, innovations, and redress for inequalities in services provided by various schools: at the central level rules and procedures would be established to protect differences generated by local experimentation and innovation. Avenues of arbitration for local conflicts would be provided. The increased local autonomy of schools within a system must not reduce the ability of the central and regional administrations to defend their individual units against external attacks. However, the authority left at higher levels must at the same time not be used to unfairly influence or over-ride decisions formally delegated to the school.

The role of the centre would thus cover a variety of functions:-

. developing through representative means, the general aims of education and broad curriculum objectives

. setting budgetary guidelines and allocating finance

. allocating the systems resources amongst the sub-units

. negotiating with external agencies concerning the systems collective needs

. initiating collective action and co-ordinating activities within the system.

The regional support roles would be chiefly concerned with the provision of consultative networks and resources unavailable at the school level. The combination of functions of regional and central administrations would institute a system of checks and balances to protect the interests of students at the school level, of schools at the regional level, and regions at the State level.

Discussion Points:

. *In what areas and to what extent should some degree of centralized control be retained in a system of school based decision sharing?*

. *What financial controls and procedures are required at State, regional and school levels to ensure that the requirement of accountability is observed and that efficiency is maintained?*

. *What forms of training and development activities are required to prepare teachers, parents, community, etc., for their new roles?*

ADVANTAGES OF SCHOOL BASED DECISION SHARING

Participation in school based decision-making by all the parties legitimately involved in the educational process - teachers, education administrators, students, parent and community members - has many advantages.

These include:

. the production of better decisions through the inclusion of more people in the decision-making process which adds new perspectives and thus broadens policy options.

. the promotion of more efficient and more co-operative work among members of the school community. People are more likely to abide by the decisions they take part in making than by those they did not.

- the closer identification of staff, students and parents with the purposes and operations of the school as a result of their involvement in the decision-making process. Agreement between the values of the school, home and work place leads to higher motivation and better learning.

- the growth of individual and community awareness of the important educational issues that each school faces which will lead to a reduction in uninformed criticism of the schools and contribute to a sense of community.

- the improved utilization of community resources to enrich the school program, and the encouragement of community use of the school's resources.

- the enrichment of the work of staff and school aides by the full utilization of their skills and energies.

- the reduction of the apathy and powerlessness characteristically felt by low status members of monolithic, hierarchical systems and the consequent elevation of their self-esteem and feelings of effectiveness.

- the development of better mechanisms for the resolving of conflicting interests between the parties involved in the educational process at the school.

- the design of school programs that reflect the local social/ethnic/economic and cultural diversity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

True participation in decision-making at the school level becomes a reality only when all the partners in the educational process have an effective voice in the policies and program of the school and in their implementation. The question is not who should control the school, but how can the governance of schools be arranged so that it is representative of all the parties directly and legitimately involved?

There is no one best way for promoting community collaboration in the decisions made at the school, no single approach that is going to be appropriate for each and every school. In NSW, for example, representative committees of staff and parents are found in some schools. A recent study found a high correlation between quality projects submitted to the State Disadvantaged Schools Committee and the existence of such representative committees. These committees included staff and parents and had the support of the whole school staff and guaranteed full staff consultation and participation in the formulation of the school submission and in its implementation. This study has prompted the State Committee to conduct a campaign designed to persuade schools to establish representative committees in the interests of better education.[1]

Elsewhere in Australia and overseas, the school council is emerging as the dominant mechanism for promoting school-community collaboration in school governance. Their character, responsibilities and effectiveness vary widely. At this stage in the devolution of responsibility for education, patterns are not firmly fixed and there is a wide scope for the development of imaginative initiatives.

While the model of involvement still needs widespread thought and discussion, the generally low level of involvement in NSW schools clearly shows the need for legislation enabling the formation of bodies that legitimise the representation and participation of teachers, students, parents and community members in school governance. These bodies would have ultimate responsibility for the policies and decisions outlined previously in this paper.

Whatever their form, their success will be largely dependent on the following features:-

. access to information: effective collaboration requires informed decision-making which is dependent on access to necessary information. Too often efforts founder because groups do not have the information they need, do not know what information is available or how to obtain it, or meet with the resistance of school officials who are unwilling to provide it. Constructive

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1. *NSW State Disadvantaged Committee, Disadvantaged Schools Program - School Committees, Circular 17-3-78.*

activity requires a sound knowledge base. To assess a new curriculum program, for instance requires a great deal of information - what are the costs involved, what are the State requirements and recommendations, what research evidence supports it, what is the experience of similar programs elsewhere, etc. At another level access to information is essential to ensure that public discussion of school issues is an informed one.

If this new structure is to prove successful, schools need to begin by providing more open information about their operations to the community.

- provision of training: teachers, administrators and parents required to perform expanded roles will require orientation to their new tasks and assistance in the development of decision-making skills.

- open communication: special attention needs to be paid to establishing effective communication channels. Unless all people affected by decisions are kept informed, valuable support can be lost. This implies that people need to be consulted before a decision that directly affects them is made and that full explanations of decisions should be disseminated to all interested parties.

- effective leadership: a sensitive and imaginative leadership is necessary to co-ordinate and maximize the contributions of all members of the school community.

- planning for change and improvement: change is an ongoing process and, therefore, initiatives require continuous planning, monitoring and evaluation. Adequate planning is essential if costly and frustrating failures are to be avoided.

- an organizational philosophy designed to facilitate positive interaction within the school - Hedley Beare[1] has articulated such a philosophy in eleven propositions:-

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1. *Hedley Beare The Beare Eleven, Canberra: ACT Schools Authority, 1977.*

1 The organization must be concerned about people
2 The organization must be effective and efficient at the same time
3 The organization must have a low bureaucratic profile
4 The organization should be organismic and in dynamic flux
5 An educational organization must encourage participation
6 The organizational structure and its mode of operating should delimit hierarchy and emphasise collegiality
7 The educational organization should be an open organization
8 The educational organization should encourage school based action and initiative
9 The educational mission overrides every other consideration
10 The educational organization should encourage innovation
11 (The organization) should be an optimistic organization

Discussion Points:

- *What are the possible alternative forms of school governance and their implications?*
- *Should the need to maximise equality of opportunity and to protect the rights of minority groups limit the devolution of responsibility to the school level?*
- *How can the school communicate more effectively with the members of its community?*

CONCLUSION

Schools vary enormously in their capacity to assume authority and responsibility for making decisions and at times there will be conflicting interests among the members of the school community. Devolution of decision-making authority to the school level also raises problems associated with student and staff mobility, the restriction in choice of schools due to current zoning regulations and those problems involved in protecting and catering for minority needs. While further progress in devolution of responsibility must be made with these things clearly in sight, the gains that will accrue from school based decision sharing far outweigh the initial difficulties that these problems may present.

The movement towards school based decision-making draws its strength from a number of sources, including the demand for participation from students and parents; the expanding view of professionalism being taken by teachers; the general political trend to consultation in decision-making; and the search, by administrators, for increased effectiveness and sensitivity in providing services.

School based decision sharing is not synonomous with total school autonomy, but is rather a way of redefining the role of schools in order to direct the energies of all those involved in schooling towards the better education of students.

SOME EXAMPLES OF SCHOOL BASED DECISION SHARING

Sackville Street Public School, NSW - is a new school in a new housing area. A Hall and Grounds Committee consisting of four P & C members and the principal as an ex-officio member was set up early in the school's life. The Committee was charged with formulating a long term plan for the development of the school grounds, the setting of the policy for the letting of the school hall within departmental guidelines, and the responsibility for spending the income from the hire of the hall and grounds. After a period of simply overseeing these policies, the work of the Committee was expanded at a recent P & C meeting to include matters of school policy and curriculum. The Committee's membership was subsequently expanded to include a teacher representative from both the primary and infants departments, and the Mistress as ex-officio.

Winston Heights Primary School, NSW - has begun to involve parents in curriculum development. One or both parents of more than 50% of a Year 4 class were involved in the development and evaluation of a social science unit in 1977. The parents contributed to the decision-making process in designing the unit and later acted as resource people and assistants in the various teaching and learning activities. The teacher acted as a professional adviser and resource person, but was just another member of the group when it came to the decision-making.

St. Bernadette's School, Dundas Valley, NSW - has delegated a good deal of decision-making responsibility for their library to parents and staff. Initially, the school was faced with the problem of having a need for a school library, an empty classroom to house it, but the lack of a librarian on the staff to develop it. A suggested

solution was to ask parents of children in the school to help set the library up and operate it on a day to day basis. At a "brainstorming" session involving the principal and over thirty parents, the general operating procedures were formulated. These were later passed on to the staff who contributed some additional suggestions before the procedures were adopted. The decisions involving the purchase of carpet and fittings for the library were made in a similar shared fashion involving parents, staff and principal. The library is now fully operated by about twenty-five mothers on a roster basis.

A.C.T. Schools - have school boards which, within the broad guidelines issued by the Schools Authority, have the autonomy to decide the way in which the schools operate. The boards consist of the principal and two teachers of the school, three representatives of the P & C, a member appointed by the Schools Authority, and in the case of secondary schools, two student members. The chairperson is elected from the lay members of the board. The boards have formal power to perform functions which include determining education policies to be implemented in the school, assessing physical, monetary and staffing needs, and developing relationships with the community and community groups. A great variety in programs offered by the schools has resulted with the increased community participation, especially in curriculum decision-making.

Huntingdale Technical School, Victoria - has three main decision-making bodies. The School Meeting is held once a term and is open to students, teachers, parents, Council members and community people. It deals with matters that concern the whole community of the school and is responsible, with other bodies, for formulating the school's statement of principles. The School Council has significant legal powers relating to financial matters, the employment of non-teaching staff, the recommendations of appointment of teaching staff and the control of buildings and grounds. It consists of four elected staff, four students, four parents, four members of the school's community involvement group, four other community members, a ministerial nominee and a representative of the local council. The principal is a non-voting member. The third body is the Academic Board which comprises both the teaching and non-teaching staff. The Board makes the decisions that dictate the day to day operation of the school, particularly in terms of how the staff offer themselves in their professional role. The Board meetings are open to students, parents and Council members who all have voting and speaking rights like everyone else.

YOUR RESPONSES ARE INVITED

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